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ABSTRACT

The problems associated with small villages are among the most difficult in Dutch physical planning, for they encompass the support of minimum social services in small towns and villages; the preservation of areas of ecological and scenic value; the acommodation of a growing population desirous of a home in the country or continued country living; and accommodation of radical changes in the social structure of small towns and villages caused by migration. Within the Netherlands there are currently three major phenomena which must be addressed independently and, preferably, on a regional basis. These phenomena include: the withering village (due, principally, to the decrease of working populations in agriculture and a general decline in the Dutch birth rate); the suburbanizing village (increasing populations due to proximity to urban centers and the desire of urban dwellers to live outside the urban center); urban migration to withering villages (due to increasing nostalgia for the country and nature). Planning for these phenomena must be handled differently, for the withering village needs sustaining facilities and organizations, while the suburbanizing town needs provisions which facilitate the expectations of the in-coming urbanites and those of the established rural population, and migration to withering villages must be viewed as a manifestation of social change. (JC)

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SMALL VILLAGE PLANNING PROBLEMS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of the small villages is one of the most difficult problems in Dutch physical planning. As to this problem four aspects can be distinguished. Firstly, the level of facilities in towns and villages; secondly, government policy in the dense-populated country to keep open the space between built-up areas as much as possible and to preserve areas of great ecological and scenic value; thirdly, radical changes in the social structure of either towns and villages, and finally the desire of a still growing part of the Dutch population to have a home in a small town or village or to continue living there. If governement policy in physical planning will be successfull in solving the problem of the small villages, it is established that this policy must be pursued strongly differentiated.

The total number of villages and hamlets in The Netherlands with less than one thousand inhabitants is about 2000. In these settlements altogether more than a million of people are living. Small villages are found especially in the northern part of the country, in the Rhine Valley in the middle and in the South-West (see map). A majority of the small villages in these parts of the country are declining in number of inhabitants; most of the small villages in the other parts have increasing numbers. Many small villages which are strongly increasing, are found especially within and around the Greenheart in the West as well as around the cities in the East and the South.

Declining of small villages is mainly caused by the process of the decrease of working population in agriculture. Many people who leave agriculture cannot find another job in their own village or in a place at commuter-distance of it. In the last years another cause of declining is the excessive decrease of the birth rate which decrease occurring all over the country is taking place in most of the villages too. Many small villages in the western part of the Netherlands and also in places in the eastern and southern parts are strongly increasing in number of innabitants by cause of their small distance to a big city or another centre of employment as well as by their attractiveness as place of living for townspeople who tired of the urban living have chosen a home in the countryside.

Dealing with the planning problems caused by small villages one has to distinguish clearly between the small villages which are withering on the one hand and the small villages strongly growing on the other. These two kinds of small villages are causing planning problems which are totally different from each other.

WITHERING VILLAGES

As a consequence of the declining of the number of inhabitants in small villages various provisions which are providing for economic and social needs, have ceased to exist. The grocer, the baker and the butcher each they have to close their ship, because there are less village people and also because the remaining dwellers travel more often to the much better shop-equipped towns and larger villages. Also many craftsmen have been forced to stop their business, not the least as a consequence of farm mechanization by which mechanics specialized in installing as well as repairing of machines and other farm equipment mostly come up to the farm from a local town in which their firm generally has been situated. In some withering small villages the primary school had to be closed, perhaps together with the departure of the local minister. Apart from the decrease of the number of inhabitants this departure is also due to the secularization of the rural population. Some small villages are knowing problems in corporate life. Not only caused by the declining potential membership but also by lack of capable leaders and material accomodation either. School buildings mostly have also a function for some local associations.

Though travelling to other places to provide for material needs is thought more or less difficult by part of the inhabitants of small villages, it could be established by investigations that these inhabitants by and large evaluate their living conditions not worse than those of urban people. Also it could be found out that for people living in small villages the social relationships, especially those in their own local community, must be considered for their welfare as more important than providing them with goods and services. About three quarters of the people living in withering small villages wish to continue living there, because they are identifying themselves strongly with their local community 1). But the identification with the village in its social manifestation is only possible, if there is a minimum of provisions. Among the provisions by which people living in villages are able to identify themselves with the local community best, the primary school and some associations, as for example a musical society or a football-club, have to be mentioned. This means that villages which do not have the opportunity to support a primary school or one social club of another as social entities are doomed to disappear. We have to realise that in our society which is full of either alienation and massification the identifications with the local community must be considered as a a great value. In my opinion, therefore government policy has to be directed in such a way as to afford the conditions for maintaining this value within the small villages as much as possible: as a matter of course next to other local communities.

SUBURBANIZING VILLAGES

In small villages experiencing a large increase of population, mostly by cause of suburbanization, the problem of having not enough basis for providing for primary social as well as economic needs apparently do not exist. People moving to these villages for the most part are young; mostly they have children who are considered to the local school. Most of them are well-situated; good jobs and relatively high incomes. Then it would be expected that they strongly contribute to the local provisions. This is not always the case however. Most of the people having settled into small villages recently are former urban dwellers who are accustomed to an urban level of living; as to the village provisions they have high demands. Although they have chosen living in the countryside, they are willing to continue their urban way of life as much as possible. In stead of being pulled by the village many of these urban immigrants have been pushed by the city, because they do not have been able to find an appropriate house in a suitable environment there. People with such an urban background continue to orient themselves to the provisions in the city, partly also those for the daily needs. In small villages even there are urban newcomers who are sending their children to the school in a nearby town, because they think the local school not qualified enough.

There is another reason why the large expansion of small villages brings problems along with it. In the densely populated Netherlands especially in the urbanized western part, there is a great danger that different built-up areas are growing together. This has the more disadvantages, because just in the western part too the country is rather flat and because there is very few woodland. In a hilly country experiencing of opennes is much more easy. Since in the Netherlands physical planning is in existence, especially after the Second Report on Physical Planning has appeared ten years ago, it is the government policy to guide the expansion of builtup areas to a small number of centres of growth. According to this policy, only in very exceptional cases the expansion of small villages is intended. However, as a consequence of the lack of adequate instruments of policy the government only partly is successfull in this policy of combined deconcentrations, as it is called. Besides the strong desire of many urban people to an "outside"-living as well as the sho rhortage of suitable houses which are needed by them, the rise of prosperity as well as the increased motorisation are important counter-acting forces. Moreover, many small municipalities mostly having a small village or more inside their boundaries, see their opportunity to draw city-dwellers looking for an "outside"-home to them; in most of the cases with the help of fine-nosed builders.

In respect to the pace of building, land costs, procedure to obtain the building allowance, etc. compared with the centres of growth these small munipalities are often in a favourable position. Thus they easily can compete with these larger centres.

It will be clear that small villages which in recent years many urban people have been moved in, are confronted with radical changes in the local social structure. Between the established and the outsiders usually there are great differences as to age structure, occupational structure (small independents, wage-workers vs. salaried workers, employees), income structure, religious structure (strong religious bonds vs. unchurchly people), political structure (confessional vs. non-confessional parties). The continuing city-orientation of at least part of the newcomers has been mentioned already. This behaviour generally is disapproved of by the established for whom making use as much as possible of the local provisions is felt as an obligation.

Perhaps as the most important difference between the established and the outsiders in small villages their divergent styles of living have to be considered. In many respect the established are behaving themselves towards each other differently as the outsiders are doing. The former are interested in other things than the latter do. They join other associations. They furnish their houses otherwise. They rear their children differently. In many respect the established are ordering their life in a manner different from the outsiders. For example, recently it appeared from an investigation in one of the northern provinces of the Netherlands that among people who in the last ten years have been moved from a city to the small villages in this province about ten procent without having been married is living with a partner 2). For the established villagers living in the conviction that if you want to have sexual intercourse, according to the order of God you have to be married, that way of life must lead straight to the hell.
It is obvious that also for reasons in connection with the social life in small villages a large increase of the number of inhabitants as a result of extensive settling of city-people has to be condemned.

MIGRATION TO WITHERING VILLAGES

While the migration by townsmen to villages at relative short distance is taking place in the Netherlands already for some decades, in the last years this migration can also be observed to some of the more remote villages which were withering up to now more often than not. It is indicated obviously that especially after 1970 settling by newcomers into these villages has shown a sharp increase, though compared with the small villages which are growing strongly either its pace and its proportion are on a much lower level. Migrants to the former small villages usually settle into dwellings which have been abandonned by farmers, farm labourers, craftsman, shopkeepers, local ministers etc. Only in exceptional cases they move

into new built houses.

People having been moved to withering small villages are having characteristics differing in many respect from those of newcomers in the other villages 3). Therefore it is assumed that the interest of people living in more remote small villages for the most part is caused by nostalgic feelings towards romanticism and nature. An excessive rise of such feelings can be observed in the Netherlands in many fields of life. In the author's opinion this rise has to be connected with the radical changes which are occurring in Dutch society now. Changes as to marriage and sexuality, the field of education, religious life, political relationships, etc. It strikes that the increase of settling by urban migrants into withering small villages has not been interrupted by the economic crisis which started in 1972-73. Although it cannot be denied that the migration to withering small villages has fashionable features, it must be assumed that it will continue in the near future certainly.

Contrary to the situation in small villages which are growing strongly, in withering ones social relationships between the established and the outsiders generally prove to be rather good. Also in view of the essential significance with some local provisions have for the welfare of the established villagers, settling by urban people into small villages, provided on a limited scale, in my opinion, has to remain possible.

CONCLUSION

All of the things mentioned above as to the problems of small villages may have made clear that an adequate approach by planning authorities of these problems has to be strongly differentiated. In the Third Report on Physical Planning of 1975 the Dutch Government has stated that the development of small villages has to be considered at a regional level, not on a national scale. It may be expected that in the Report on the Rural Regions which will appear next year, this good intention will be elaborated rightly.

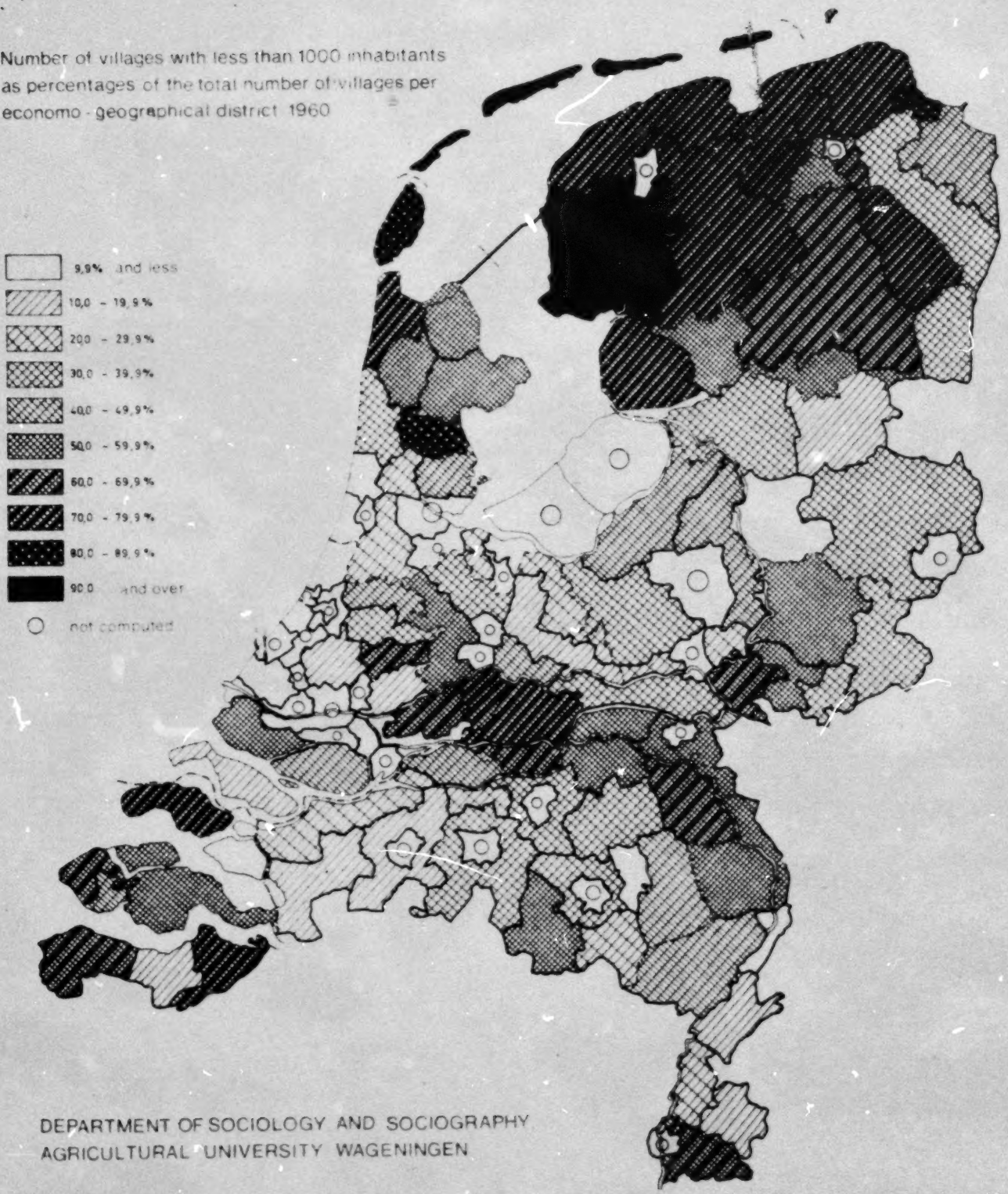
NOTES

1) Groot, J.P. (1972), Kleine plattelandskernen in de Nederlandse samenleving (Small rural communities in Dutch society), Mededelingen Landbouwhogeschool 72-8, Wageningen, p. 226.

2) Groot, J.P. and M.E. de Groot (1976), De kleine dorpen in Groningen (The small villages in Groningen), Vakgroep Sociologie en Sociografie van de Landbouwhogeschool, p. 60.

3) For example newcomers living in withering villages scarcely have an income higher than that of the established, while they are participating in local clubs to about the same extent as the latter (see: Groot, J.P. and M.E. de Groot, op. cit.)

Number of villages with less than 1000 inhabitants as percentages of the total number of villages per economo - geographical district 1960



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